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Lawn&Garden Marketing

MANAGING THE SELL-IN SEASON

Sharpening buying skills

Calculating landed costs

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

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Lawn&Garden Marketing

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Coming up: The annual Lawn & Garden Marketing Source Book, a useful directory of products and of lawn and garden wholesale distributors; a compendium of industry-related associations and organizations, and addresses of manufacturers, growers and suppliers.

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Some families own two sizes or types of barbecuing equipment; some, only one-half. It's a rare household that never barbecues.

New data, trends on patio products

By Marjorie Riggin

Americans have brought home the hotel-motel poolside concept and are buying to make backyard vacations as alluring, year-round, as those fantasies, faraway.

■Several patterns took shape as retailers of patio and poolside furniture and allied lines were interviewed across the country by **Lawn and Garden Marketing.** Certain preferences remain regional, but regional trends overlap. Those items coming up strong are non-regional in demand. Quality was the key word from every retailer, every direction. America is staying home in style. Three styles, in fact.

Credit the upsurge in building decks on existing houses, the back-to-nostalgia veranda movement and clipped-wing travelers who brought home hotel-motel poolside concepts. Altogether these factors have contributed to a casual living market that advances steadily in an otherwise shaky economy.

Swing to Nostalgia

Knowing your market is perhaps more important than ever before. Regional preferences may blur, but there is sharp demarcation between those who shop determinedly for updated traditional styles vs. those, usually younger, families who yearn for great-grandmother's front

Figures from the Barbecue Industry Association confirm the continuing upward trend in sales of charcoal and gas outdoor cookery equipment. Electric grill sales, only, declined but significant growth is expected in the demand for electric water smokers.

	1979		1980	
	Units	Dollars	Units	Dollars
Charcoal	9,686,981	$ 99,781,874	10,273,192	$116,454,471
Gas	1,366,328	135,057,888	1,592,774	163,785,783
Electric Grills	117,728	4,375,308	109,405	4,897,727
Electric Smokers	272,164	no $ figure given	324,041	no $ figure given

In 1981 sales of 12,700,000 barbecue type units are anticipated — a 5.7% increase

porch, complete with swing. These latter are the families who buy handmade, rough cedar furniture; cast-iron-with-oak park bench and table sets; heavy pieces of solid redwood; wicker, if the mood is pre-WWI. They are not alone in desiring swings, but their preference is for the old fashioned type suspended by chains. No porch? One California retailer reported wood swings selling year-round to hang before fireplaces from open beam ceilings. "Nostalgia" is number three of the casual lifestyles. It is moving up.

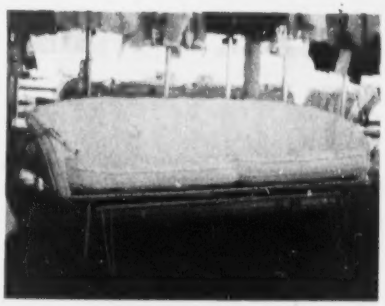
In an exception when tradition and nostalgia merge, and again in California, suspended swings in leafy, welded wrought iron, cushioned for comfort, are selling well in the $350 range.

Add-a-piece tradition

Tradition and wrought iron stay synonomous although the "iron" may be aluminum. Traditionalists also are buying genuine wicker and rattan or a weather-wise simulation in fiberglass. These types of casual furniture find their way indoors so this market isn't necessarily seasonal. Even more than others, traditional buyers demand a sustained, open stock of styles. Retailers reporting a twelve month patio display confirm significant income from add-a-piece purchasing of quality items. They also feel that the spectrum of items available is adequate; they like the new neutral colors that are compatible with customers' existing furniture of white, black and antiqued green.

Backyard vacationland, U.S.A.

Third of the three styles, contemporary, may be purchased only for poolside or may be used wherever a household relaxes from formal living. Strap-type furniture of coated metal and plastic is advancing at an approximate 35 percent rate, according to one dealer. Buyers like the comfortable adjustment to body contours, fade-resistant colors and, with reasonable care, near-indestructability. Another type of contemporary furniture, PVC (polyvinyl chloride), is in strong demand where salt air is a problem, but has not made vast inroads inland. New designs, new protective polymers and new methods of distribution may change the picture.



To have a glider big enough for "stretching out," one customer drove 160 miles roundtrip.

Matching accessories are especially important to this group who view their backyard living as an extension of the lavish hotel service they enjoy when traveling. One Midwest retailer expressed need for a reasonably priced, readily portable poolside bar, with stools, to match current styles and complete the jet set illusion.

Buyers in all three categories recognize their casual furniture as

continued...

an investment. Every retailer interviewed stressed quality as the No. 1 criterion.

Heating up

Hottest merchandise on the 1981-82 cool pool and patio scene appears to be those items that ARE hot. Affordable electric smokers are coming on strong; sales of grills of all types reflect Mom's movement away from the kitchen (see table); hot tubs and spas are showing an unexpected 250 percent increase in one year; and insect control devices that may sizzle, pop or perform quietly are selling like hotcakes wherever there are light-attracted flying bugs.

ICDs are electric or electronic. Some use cool light, others are designed for effective heat deflection. They are popular in a lower price range of $50-$60 retail and in average size, clearing approximately ½ acre. At this price many have been gift-wrapped for Father's Day, birthdays and house-pool-patio warmings. ICDs, according to random survey, are merchandised through lawn, garden and leisure furniture outlets, discount chains and mail order; and demand seems to exceed supply. One rejecting retailer, "...they attract bugs..," admitted that correct installation and consumer-use education probably would make the difference. Economy of operation, about five cents per month, and the ecological advantage of providing uncontaminated insects for pet birds and fish were cited as merchandising pluses by an enthusiastic pool, patio and equipment dealer in Houston.

This season hot tubs and spas appear to be installed in some areas at least as often as backyard swimming pools, and have made a surprising incursion into less-than-exotic locales. Reasons given **LGM:** they are easier to maintain; they extend the pool season where weather is varied; and they appeal to families who wish to be first with whatever is new to the neighborhood.

Smoke signals

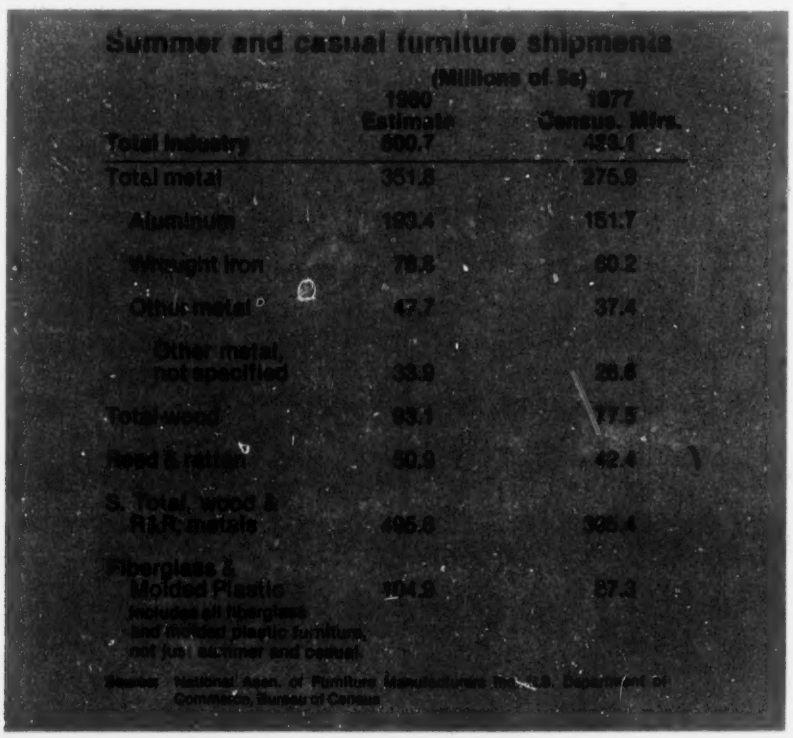
The direction continues up for all types of barbecue equipment with sales expected to near 12,700,000 in 1981. Within the broad category that includes charcoal, gas, LP gas and electric only one recognizable trend appeared but many trends may show their beginnings in comments made to **LGM.**

Electric water smokers are on a definite, upward trend as a type—with the smaller variety selling strong when "the price isn't too high," "as a second barbecuing device for a grill-owning family," and in a size that "doesn't require 220." They fit well into condo balcony and zero lot line living.

Dual dwellings have given rise to dual-ownership of barbecue grills and covered kettles—a new phenomenon reported in Chicago. Conversely, a large and a small grill or a grill and a smoker, both, are considered as necessary as two cars by many families. And even infrequent barbecuers are investing in better quality as opposed to frequent replacement! Finally, backyards are now private vacationlands but the go-everywhere grill or cooker remains in demand. Tail-gate parties, picnics and the beach still beckon.

A market in action

If hot and cool seem contradictory, consider the paradox of *action* furniture, also moving up. Mobile America may be settling down but not sitting still, even when relaxing. Chairs bounce or swivel; rockers, rock; swings-on-chains and swings-on-stands are in demand; and gliders, especially three-person gliders, are in short supply. Asked for "druthers," one retailer fervently requested the old style, sofa-sized glider and reported a sufficiency of the love seat variety. Another advised **LGM** that, "at that very moment," a man was driving eighty miles for that retailer's one remaining large glider after having canvassed by phone every similar merchant in his shopping sphere. Rock, twirl, bounce, swing or glide, action furniture is an established trend. Except for the swivel chair in Massachusetts where, according to one dealer, non-traditional mechanisms may be suspect. Swiveling is O.K. in the office, he said, but in his state casual swiveling hasn't caught on. □


Summer and casual furniture shipments
(Millions of $s)
1980 Estimate
1977 Census, Mfrs.
Total industry 600.7 429.1
Total metal 351.8 275.9
Aluminum 193.4 151.7
Wrought iron 78.8 60.2
Other metal 47.7 37.4
Other metal, not specified 33.9 26.6
Total wood 93.1 77.5
Reed & rattan 50.9 42.4
S. Total, wood & R&R metals 495.8 395.4
Fiberglass & Molded Plastic 104.9 87.3
Includes all fiberglass and molded plastic furniture, not just summer and casual.
Source: National Assn. of Furniture Manufacturers Inc., U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census